“I AM ALONE HERE”

LEGAL STATUS AND CARE-GIVING IN THE EXPERIENCES OF TRANSNATIONAL REFUGEES

MASTERS’ THESIS

CULTURE, COMMUNICATION AND GLOBALIZATION

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

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Abstract

A growing body of literature on transnationalism points to how legal status and rights influence the maintenance of family relations. Refugees and asylum-seekers are dependent on the outcome of the asylum procedure as it indicates their chance of mobility, education and professional prospects, financial support, communication and emotional involvement. In the acknowledgement that care-giving does not end with migration, I have documented the experiences of transnational refugee mothers from Afghanistan in Germany. I illustrate this framework through qualitative methods employed on a group of Afghan women with family members in the transit country Greece. The literature used is grounded in the care-giving capabilities and resources that mothers have according to their legal status. I argue that the rights according to the legal status can hinder and impede certain forms of engagement in family life. I conclude, that in refining the literature on transationalism, future research should be more inclusive of refugee experiences.

Keywords: transnationalism, refugee, care-giving, legal right, legal status

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1. Introduction

Restrictive immigration policies in Europe are increasingly hindering asylum seekers and refugees in their care-giving abilities. Numerous studies (Zontini, 2004; Al-Ali, 2002) show that labour migrants engage and maintain transnational relations by developing transnational activities. What is rather interesting about migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is the type of care-giving abilities in which they engage (Merla, Baldassar, 2011).

As Al-Ali (2002) argues, the issue of control lies at the heart of political concern. The media has created the conditions for popular panic about predominantly male asylum seekers, most of which are 'largely unfounded'. The 'irregular' arrivals of migrants are mostly represented in public imagery as families, lone men, or women with children. Overlooked, but also genuinely difficult to represent, are women who travelled alone, or travelled with family but ultimately had different countries of destination. In contrast, female labour migrants dominate the research and literature on transnational parenthood, a reason perhaps for the overrepresentation of 'transnational motherhood' as opposed to 'transnational fatherhood' (Shrover, Shinkel, 2012)

Both female and male refugees are set to leave their offspring in Greece and travel further to Germany through smuggling networks. Small-scale research conducted at this point does not aim to generalize the mobility of all refugees (Al-Ali et al., 2002). However, the kind of mobility we see in asylum seekers in Europe is significantly different from any other type of migrant group.

1.1 Research Questions

This thesis seeks to investigate how the legal status, legal rights, and migration context influence the care-giving capabilities in established transnational relations (Merla, Baldassar, 2011). The research is guided by the following research questions:

How do Afghan mothers in Germany sustain family relations while their families reside in a country of transit?

How do transnational refugee mothers make use of care-giving capabilities?

In what ways does their legal status influence the manner of care-giving across borders?

I reflect on how these factors limit and hinder the circulation of care across time and space and while, emphasizing the importance of access to the technologies and resources that

facilitate communication, travel and family reunification, include rights to citizenship and residency.

1.2 Purpose of the Research

As of 2015, Germany is the European country with the highest intake of Afghan asylum seekers (Migration Report, 2015). Of those asylum seekers, women (10%) make up a significantly smaller share of new arrivals than men (90%) (ibid.). Asylum seekers have specific legal rights depending on their legal status and the sending and receiving country to which they are conditioned. The literature on transnational parenting is very often linked to labour migrants and less to asylum seekers and refugees (Madziva, Zontini, 2012). Hence, my thesis aims to contribute to the discussion on care-giving capabilities of Afghan mothers and their forced migration at a time when Germany's policies on immigration are in transition.

Following the Introduction, the next chapter discusses the use of terms in the thesis which is followed by the Literature Review. The Theoretical Framework informs the reader about the concepts and theories of choice. The following chapter concerns the Migration context including legal rights the women are entitled to according to their legal status. In the Methodological Framework I discuss the choice of qualitative data collection, sample frame and data evaluations. The Analytical Framework is divided into ... chapters according to the typology of care-giving capabilities.

2. Terminology

The purpose of this section is to identify some of the key terms used in the thesis and offer context to their use. The wider currency of a term such as 'refugee' tends to provoke misuse. In order to avoid misuse of terms, I proceed with giving an account of meaning for the frequently occurring terms according to the European Commission (2018).

Firstly, the term 'country of transit/origin/destination' is used in the thesis frequently, as I aim to illustrate the transnational aspect of the refugee families. According to the European Commission, the country of transit is the country "through which migratory flows (regular or irregular) move." Additionally, the term suggests the existence of a country of origin, "the country of nationality or, for stateless persons, of former habitual residence [....] country that is a source of migratory flows (regular or irregular)" (European Commission, 2018) – and a destination country – the country where one wishes to end the migratory process. Therefore, the transit country is different from the country of origin, and is the country "through which a migrant passes in order to enter a country of destination" (European Commission, 2018).

An asylum seeker or asylum applicant is "a non-EU national or a stateless person who has made an application for asylum in respect of which a final decision has not yet been taken" (European Commission, 2018). An asylum application is when a non-EU national or stateless person requests international protection by an EU State. Asylum authorities of EU States gather and make use of information in order to analyse the reasons for fleeing and subsequently the "socio-political situation" in the country of origin. The assessment of the applicants for international protection (and, where necessary, in countries through which they have transited) is carried out on an individual basis. 'Asylum' is a form of protection by the "state, on its territory, based on the principle of non-refoulement and internationally or nationally recognised refugee rights (e.g. access to employment, social welfare and health care). It is granted to a person who is unable or unwilling to seek protection in his/her country of citizenship and/or residence, in particular, for fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (European Commission, 2018).

Lastly, the term refugee refers to "a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him-/herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his/her former habitual residence as a

result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (European Commission, 2018).

3. Literature Review

In order to answer the research questions, this Master's thesis investigates how asylum-seeking Afghan mothers in Germany sustain family ties with members of the family in Greece, according to Merla and Baldassar's (2011) conception of care-giving capabilities. By shifting the focus from mothers with a family in the home country to mothers with a family in a transit country, as Zontini (2010) argues, a more diverse sample in transnational theories can be established. The reviewed literature on refugees and transnational care, contributes to this research by placing the broad concepts of transnationalism and migration into a comprehensive framework. By pointing to the existing literature on transnationalism and transnational motherhood, I seek to comprise the relevant literature on care-giving arrangements and argue its relevance. The growing body of literature that focuses on labour migrants (Madianou, Miller, 2012; Parreñas, 2001; Ryan, 2011; Zontini, 2010; Madziva, Zontini, 2012) is referred to in the thesis as a point of reference rather than as theoretical conceptualization.

3.1 Literature on Transnational Families and Transnational Motherhood

According to Merla and Baldassar's (2011) typology of resources through which mothers give care and sustain family relations across borders, demonstrate how transnational mothers are indeed actively emotionally and financially involved in the daily family life, even without being able to provide hands-on, proximity care. Zontini and Madziva (2012) investigated how migration context, immigration policies, ability to find a job and family resilience, can be adapted to refugee families as supposed to labour migrants in order to understand the experiences of Zimbabwean refugee mothers in the UK. They found that the strict asylum policies restrict the "successful development" of transnational relations rather than the geographical distance. In their study on 18 refugee women, they found that the legal status shapes the way in which parenting is done from distance. Their status denies them the right to work and thus send remittances, and the right to apply for family reunification.

Although much of the research done in this field focuses on the experiences of migrants, diaspora and expats, very few have a definite focus on refugees and subsequently on their experiences (Al-Ali, Koser, 2004). The experiences of different migrant groups reflect on how proximity does not stand in the way of maintaining and developing relationships across

transnational families worldwide (Baldassar et al., 2007; Gamburd, 2000; Goulbourne et al., 2010; Merla, 2012; Parreñas, 2001; Ryan, 2011; Zontini, 2010). Madziva and Zontini (2012) point to the gap in transnational migration studies, bringing awareness to the fact that refugee families also operate transnationally and are a part of the forced migration. The challenges of operating a family transnationally are well documented, as well as their adaptability (Kilkey, Merla, 2014). The literature on which obstacles arise is also prevalent (Ehrenreich, Hochschild, 2002; Yeates, 2009; Dahl, Spanger, 2009). The concept of 'Global Care Chains', developed by Hochshild (2001), has inspired the scholarly focus on female domestic workers from globally poor to rich countries, while their families are left behind. However, in the context of asylum seekers and refugees their ability to work or find work is conditioned by their legal status. Madziva and Zontini (2012) found that the legal status of asylum-seeking mothers determines the migration process and the ability to make future plans with family members.

Madianou and Miller (2012) showed how transnational relations are successfully sustained through technological mediums. The result of thorough analysis indicates underlying motivations and emotional consequences of separation. Moreover, Baldassar (2007) and Skrbiš (2008) suggest emotional support should also be regarded as a form of care-giving from a distance. Yet, they point to the lack of consideration of emotions when conducting research on transnational families**.** Documented experiences of labour migrants have revealed a perceived vulnerability of (mostly) female migrant workers, and their exploitation (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001) while Al-Ali et al. (2007) in turn, points to the vulnerability of all asylum-seekers and refugees. Therefore, the increased interest in documenting the experiences of female domestic workers has overshadowed the study of a more diverse migration pattern, such as the ones of asylum seekers. Kofman (2004) argues that female asylum-seekers also leave their offspring behind, or are unwillingly doing so.

As transnationalism has gained in scholarly interest, attention has shifted towards including the gender aspect (Nawyn, 2010). As gender roles are negotiated within transnational families, they become fluid. Women are increasingly associated with the 'breadwinning' role and the geographical distance is not an impediment to providing care and being fully committed to the well-being of the family (Zontini, 2010). Subsequently, the term 'transnational mothering' (Parreñas, 2001) covers the ways in which transnational family structures affect gender and gender roles. By acknowledging that more women migrate in order to take up on the role of the 'breadwinner', the traditional morals of motherhood are

challenged as well as harshly judged by other family members (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). However, leaving family behind is not a sign of 'toning down' on mothering tasks. As some transnational scholars have argued (Dreby, 2009; Lutz, Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012; Parreñas, 2005), mothers have "the competence to retain and maintain their gendered roles, particularly by providing their children with emotional care and support from a distance" (in Zontini, Madziva, 2012, p.430). Although proximity care might be passed down to other family members or local carers, emotional and financial support might still be provided towards family members.

3.2 Literature on the Role of State Involvement in Transnational Family Life

The institutional perspective of transnationalism (Kilkey, Merla, 2014; Al-Ali et al., 2002) investigates how transnational communities make use of institutions and welfare benefits to sustain and reunite with family members. Additionally, nation-states may also have a decisive role. For instance, the Eritrean government worked towards institutionalizing the diaspora for economic reasons such as the 2% tax on Eritrean salaries abroad (Al-Ali et al., 2002). Moreover, the Filipino government has encouraged emigration due to the remittances sent by women which contribute significantly to the country's economy (Zontini, 2004). Female migration from Eastern to Western Europe is also contributing to the national economies of the respective countries (Lutz, Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012). In contrast, female independent migration is not encouraged in Morocco, thus women have to negotiate their moves and are less likely to leave without their children (Zontini, 2010).

Family reunification policies are becoming more exclusive and the definition of family ties and members is narrower (Kofman, 2004). However, the gap in the research regarding the impact of legislation on transnational relations in Europe is pointed out by Kofman as well (2004). The ability to reunite with family depends on the legal status of the refugees (Zontini, Madziva, 2012). In some cases this means asylum-seekers take up undocumented work, thus exploitation and precarity in the labour market increase. Several studies (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Lutz, Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012; Parreñas, 2001; Zontini, 2010) have found that the need to provide for themselves and their children is rooted in the desire to sustain the family relations by making a better living and providing for a better future in the country of origin. Moreover, communication is a key factor in sustaining transnational relations and performing transnational parenting. As Madianou and Miller (2012) suggest, the low rates of phone calls and the increase of internet use and speed has paved the way to a more successful

communication between transnational parents and their families. The emotional support as understood by Merla and Baldassar (2011) provided through communication is illustrated in the Analysis. I conclude that mothers are 'active providers' (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Lutz and Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012; Zontini, 2010) and perform "emotional intimacy from a distance" (Dreby, 2009, p.34).

In what follows, I present the Theoretical Framework grounded in the typology laid out by Merla and Baldassar (2011). The aspects discussed thus far are to contribute and develop their findings further by applying them to a group of asylum-seekers. This research aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of care within tranansational families, such as geographically separated refugee families. For this purpose, it is worth taking Merla and Baldassar's (2011) capabilities approach as analytical tools and discuss it in the German-Afghan context. Though the experiences of labour migrants and asylum seekers can arguably be analysed as similar, a comparison between the two groups is not within the scope of this research.

4. Theoretical Framework

In order to shed light on the experiences of Afghan mothers, the concept of transnational families serves as the point of departure since this framework hints at care-giving aspects which have to be considered in order to grasp the peculiarities of family life at distance. The following section concerns the chosen theoretical framework and concepts according to which the data is analysed. I ground the theoretical framework in the concepts of transnational families and care-giving capabilities, as understood by Merla and Baldassar (2011). Thus, the analysis touches upon mobility, communication, emotional support, time allocation, education/knowledge and financial support (Merla, Baldassar, 2011) while regarding the role of legal status in the typology of these six care-giving capabilities.

4.1 Theoretical Conceptions

In discussing the capabilities of care-giving mothers in Germany, I have chosen to link the theory on transnational families with legal rights, legal status and migration context. In order to shed light on the care-giving modalities and arrangements of transnational refugee families, this study relies on the capabilities approach (Merla, Balsassar, 2011).

The concept of transnational families has a broad scope but mainly deals with geographically separated families and how these negotiate and develop gender roles, emotions and communication across borders (Baldassar et al., 2007). Additionally, as the research area is vast and ranges from child to elderly care at a distance (Glick, 2010), most strands of research focus on the changes of gender and intergenerational relations (Landolt & Wei Da, 2005). The concept of transnational families highlights the peculiarities of family life at distance, such as emotional support and the importance of transnational social ties between separated family members (Boccagni, 2010; Baldassar, 2007).

4.1.1 The Care-Giving Approach

Within the context of my thesis, I wish to highlight how residency rights influence the care-givers and their care-giving capabilities through a typology developed by Merla and Baldassar (2011). Here I draw on care-giving capabilities – mobility, communication, time allocation, emotional support, education, knowledge and financial support. According to Merla and Baldassar (2011) mobility refers to the ability to travel to receive or give care. As the informants are asylum-seekers, I will here draw upon their legal rights to do so. Communication includes the physical ability to do so and being able to invest resources in communicating while apart. Furthermore, the allocation of time refers to having the necessary

time to actively engage in care. The category ‘education and knowledge’ refers to the carers’ resilience to dedicate time to learning the local language and communication technologies. Moreover, this category refers to having one’s qualifications recognized and thus be able to access the labour market, while influencing the ability to exchange care. The financial aspect refers to the access to welfare benefits and to the labour market with which one could indirectly engage in care arrangements. Each of these capabilities requires a different set of resources.

4.1.2 The Concept of Transnational Families

The word ‘transnational’ was first introduced in the 1990s when scholars used it in the study of migration and families (Skrbiš, 2008), though these types of families have existed long before the term was introduced. The broader field of transnationalism introduced the concept of transnational families. While scholars like Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc acknowledge that the shift in migration theory meant that one ought to regard migration more than as the simple departure of individuals (Kvisto, 2001), the concept of transnational migration is described as “a process by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and of settlement“ (Glick Schiller et al., 1994, p.6). Thus, the concept of transnational family roots in the distance put between family members by the migration project. Merla and Baldassar (2011) use a transnational lens in order to emphasize the care-giving resources and capabilities created within transnational families.

A more narrow definition by Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) suggests “families live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood’, even across national borders” (p.18). Thus, family bonds and the mutual sense of belonging serve as the primary characteristics (Glick, Schiller et al., 1994) in family ties. When studying transnational families, it is essential to investigate how care-giving compensates for physical proximity, and how family members negotiate the distance through their ways of doing family (Baldassar, Merla, 2014). Merla and Baldassar (2011) employ the care-giving capabilities as a further step towards understanding how family relations are continued at a distance while emphasizing the social ties and emotional involvement between migrants and their families. The strong emotional ties remain intact despite the geographical separation (Kvisto, 2001; Merla, Baldassar, 2011; Baldassar, 2007; Skrbiš, 2008). However, with the

increase in internet connectivity and lower prices of technological access, the carers may feel a stronger sense of responsibility to engage in care-giving (Baldassar, 2007). Nonetheless, whether one or both parents migrate, notable changes occur in the means of care arrangements, communication, gender roles and familial commitments. Kilkey and Merla (2014) suggest a shift in already established patterns of parenting while they point to a higher demand of responsibilities falling on one of the parents.

The emotional support tends to be overlooked in the study of transnational families and their interactions (Baldassar, 2007; Skrbiš, 2008). Yet, Baldassar (2008) advocates an inclusion of emotional involvement in terms of 'missing and longing' while Skrbiš (2008) describes emotions "as constitutive of the transnational family experience itself" (p. 242) which ought to be shared by both the migrant and the family. Even though the family ties are defined by strength, the flow of affection, care and communication is rarely shared evenly (Baldassar, Merla, 2014).

As other theories, the conceptualization of transnational families implies certain flawed aspects when used to analyse family life across borders. The causes of separation and context of migration are often neglected despite scholars making efforts to include these aspects (Zontini, Madziva, 2012; Zontini, 2010). Moreover, the concept tends to lack inclusivity of aspects by which other migration groups, such as refugees, displaced, stateless nationals, and asylum-seekers are affected. Furthermore, Landolt and Wei Da (2005) acknowledge that in terms of care arrangements and construction, families are fundamentally uniform. One should also point to the essential difference between transnational families. Moreover, it is fundamental that we include the legal rights, context of migration and future prospects of family reunion in the study of transnational families. In the case of refugee families, transnationalism should be regarded as an outcome of specific circumstances in the country of origin and not entirely as a temporary condition.

In this chapter I discussed the care-giving capabilities approach and the concept of transnational families as a dynamic set of processes (Al-Ali, 2001; Merla, Baldassar, 2014) that flows asymmetrically and can at times influence family ties. Moreover, this exchange defines family networks in the political, social, economic and cultural structures of country of origin, transit and destination. The legal structures that impose limitations on family relations are also discussed in the context of the transnational settings. In what follows, I discuss how the legal structures designed to facilitate transnational care-giving put in place by the German

government, affect family connectedness. An additional focal point is the context of migration.

5. The Context of Migration

The following chapter concerns the context of migration. The context of migration relates to "where migrants come from; the gender regime in their country of origin; how migration is seen and if it is supported; and what the migrants' migratory projects are" (Bonizzoni, Boccagni, 2012; Lutz, Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012; Ribas, 2000; Zontini, 2010). Additionally, I relate this aspect to the decision of leaving the country of transit.

5.1 Afghan Migration to Europe

Afghanistan has been a country of emigration for asylum seekers (Afghanistan Migration Profile, 2012). Numerous conflicts, worsening security situations and denied state protection have led many to leave the country. Afghan nationals have fled their country since the late 1970s and early 1980 due to the Soviet invasion and continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The number of Afghans seeking asylum in Europe has increased due to economic and security instability caused by the Taliban regime. The Taliban rule in the 1990s forced many to flee Afghanistan and seek asylum among others in Greece and Germany. Compared to countries such as the Philippines where emigration is encouraged (Zontini, 2004), return is celebrated in Afghanistan (Afghanistan Migration Profile, 2012). Of Afghan nationals entering Europe, 54.000 obtained German citizenship (Pro Asyl, 2017).

5.1.1 Migration To and From the Country of Transit

International relations between Europe and Afghanistan have been shaped by irregular migration. Irregular border-crossings find Afghan nationals without valid documentation while using the route through Iran, Turkey and Greece or other Balkan countries (İçduygu, Karadağ, 2018). Due to its geographical position, Greece has had a significant amount of asylum-seekers and while some aim to stay, many decide to move on to countries like Germany (ibid.). Migrating from a transit country bears security concerns for both the migrant as well as the state. Yet, the irregular path is followed by many despite the restrictive asylum policies, increasing the security concerns and precarity of their journey. Among other reasons, administrative deficiencies such as the slow pace of the asylum examination process and the poverty of reception and integration mechanisms discourage people from staying in Greece (Toktaș et al., 2006). As my Analysis illustrates, for women sexual abuse, limited

access to the labour market and economic vulnerability are also reasons for seeking better living conditions.

5.1.2 Migration to Germany

The second-biggest group of non-Europeans to seek asylum in Germany were Afghans in the year 2015, with 30.026 asylum applications registered. By the end of 2016, 250.000 Afghan nationals were living across Germany of which 84.240 (33.2%) are women (Ausländerbevölkerung, 2016). However, data does not indicate how many came alone while leaving families behind. The male-dominated migration of Afghan nationals to Germany has been represented negatively in the media, while female migration and their experiences go comparatively unnoticed (Afghanistan Migration Profile, 2012). Despite Afghanistan being considered to have "safe and unsafe" regions, Afghanistan's conflict is ongoing with 11.002 civilian casualties registered in 2015. Perhaps the low acceptance rate could be explained by the fact that Germany has sent military and humanitarian aid in the hope of stabilizing the country. By accepting a high intake of asylum-seekers, Vo (2015) argues that Germany acknowledges the failure of government-led efforts to bring stability to Afghanistan. Thomas de Maizière, Germany's Home Secretary, has led policy initiatives to repatriate Afghan nationals and to prevent emigration 'in the first place' and to create a public perception that the return is 'safe' by stating:

> "There are safe regions in Afghanistan ... There's no 'Welcome to Germany' money, there aren't jobs and apartments readily available. There won't be any language and integration courses. The chances [for Afghans] to stay in Germany are slim" (Vo, 2015).

Europe has pledged an additional 1.3 billion Euros in aid towards development to Afghanistan. Additionally, The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched an off and online ad campaign in Afghanistan with the purpose of preventing Afghans from starting 'dangerous journeys with smugglers' to Germany and believing the "myths" (Rumours about Germany, 2018). Posters of *#RumorsAboutGermany* were hung in Kabul with the rhetorical questions "*Are you leaving for Germany? Are you sure?"* (Vo, 2015).

Germany has tightened immigration policies towards Afghan asylum-seekers and the new political climate, which saw a higher public vote than anticipated for Alternative für Deutschland (a right wing populist party), feeds the hostile discourse. Moreover, Chancellor Merkel vowed the deportation of applicants with denied asylum or international protection. In December Germany started the deportation of rejected Afghan asylum-seekers. Out of the

12.000 who stand to be deported, 167 have been already as of 2017. The European Union and Afghanistan's 'Joint Way Forward' is a deportation scheme that allows for an unlimited number of asylum seekers to be forcibly return back to Afghanistan. Moreover, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees offers financial incentives to rejected applicants if they return to Afghanistan voluntarily (BAMF, 2016).

5.2 Asylum Procedure in Germany

The following section briefly discusses the asylum procedure in Germany upon which two other sections concern the legal status and the rights of an asylum-seeker.

In 2015, it took an average of 3.2 months to process applications submitted by Syrians, according to Germany's Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF, 2016). For Afghans, it was 10.2 months. One reason why the acceptance rate of Afghans is so much lower than that of Syrians is because Afghanistan is now considered a country with "safe and unsafe" regions.

The responsible institution for the execution of asylum procedures in Germany is BAMF (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge – The Federal Office for migration and Refugees). After filling an asylum application, one is expected to receive information about their rights and obligations, the eligibility procedure and consequences of default (Asylum Act, 2008). The BAMF and its employees are legally required to meet these amends. Initially, BAMF examines whether an applicant falls under the Dublin Regulation of another European Union state and if the application is admissible. If Germany is responsible for the application, BAMF proceeds with conducting personal interviews, providing translators when needed. The interview is divided into two parts: one where the interviewer asks 25 standardized questions about subjects such as living conditions in the homeland and the arrival in Germany; the second part consists broadly of reasons for living the home country and what they fear when returning there (Asylum Act, 2008). Although the interview has the interviewee as a focal point, the interviewer does not take a passive stance thus he/she is expected to ask further questions when discrepancies in statements are noticeable (Directive 2013/33/EU 2013). The interview and nationality of the application are the considerations upon which and if any statutory protection is given by the Federal Office. While the process itself can take as long as eight months, one is not allowed to leave the assigned area.

5.2.1 Legal Status

Four out of five informants in my research had received the decision of their asylum application. The four forms of protection for asylum applicants in Germany are as followed: refugee protection, entitlement to asylum, subsidiary protection and national ban on deportation (BAMF, 2016). For the purpose of this research, I will give a brief account of the forms of protection and mostly focus on 'subsidiary protection', as two of my informants had received this status at the time of the interview.

The refugee protection is given to persons who do not enjoy the state protection of their country of origin on the base of "race, nationality, political opinion, fundamental religious conviction or membership of a particular group" (BAMF, 2016). 'Refugees' are outside their countries of origin due to fears of persecution by states and non-states players. "Persons subjected to human rights violations by the state due to their political beliefs while the return to their country of origin would constitute significant danger, have the right to asylum. This type of protection is in accordance to Article 16 of Basic Law and has constitutional status as a fundamental right" (BAMF, 2016). Persons receiving this status enjoy the same rights as refugee protection thus, a residence permit for three years, settlement permit possible after three or five years (under the requirements of secure living conditions and knowledge of German language), unrestricted access to the labour market and entitlement to privileged family reunification. Additionally, the national ban on deportation may be issued in the case of the applicant being in "concrete danger to life, limb or liberty" such as suffering from a life-threatening disease and not having access to healthcare in the country of origin (BAMF, 2016).

Since two of my informants had acquired subsidiary protection, I wish to give a detail account and point out their legal rights and entitlement to family reunification. In the Analysis I investigate how legal rights affect the manner in which the women offer care to family in Greece. Subsidiary protection is granted when the applicant offers a detailed account of threats they would be affected by in the country of origin. The lack of protection from states and non-state players constitute serious harm in the form of "the imposition or enforcement of the death penalty, torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or a serious individual threat to the life or integrity of a civilian as a result of arbitrary force within an international or domestic armed conflict" (BAMF, 2016).

5.2.2. The Legal Rights and Entitlement to Family Reunification

In the case of subsidiary protection, the applicant receives a one-year residence permit with the option of extending it, after five years, one can receive a settlement when the preconditions of a significant amount of German language and adequate living conditions are met (BAMF, 2016). Moreover, access to the labour market is unrestricted and entitled to family reunification. However, recent developments in the Residence Act restrict family reunification to persons with subsidiary protection until July 2018 (BAMF, 2016). For Basira this means that she can not apply for family reunion yet. If she would be eligible for family reunion, her family would be entitled to asylum in Germany as well.

For applicants with denied asylum applications, the rights one is entitled to are even more rigid. One is not entitled to a work permit or to own/rent property. More importantly within the scope of this research is the right to family reunification, which in the case of denied applications is not to be obtained. However, one has the right to appeal the decision and the waiting time is on average at 10.2 months (Vo, 2016).

The policies relate to a spectrum of families being able to migrate, more specifically to family reunion, deportation and legal status. Kofman's (2004) research on family migration to Europe investigated criteria of family reunification, its requirements and the definition of family members. She found that in the European context the criteria for family reunification became stricter while a person 'considered a family member for purposes of migration are being defined more narrowly' (Kofman in Zontini, Madziva, 2012). In the context of Afghan mothers, such limitations impede one's legal right to family reunification to Germany. Lastly, I argue that the lack of social and political rights is an impediment to family life rather than the geographical distance**.** As two of my informants had their asylum applications rejected, I regarded a section of brief background information on legal rights to be of great importance in the context of the thesis.

6. Methodological Framework

As this thesis deals with the care-giving capabilities of refugee mothers in sustaining family relations across borders, the research is based on qualitative methods in order to focus on the subjective perception of Afghan mothers and their care-giving capabilities. The dynamic process often met when gathering qualitative data (Seale et al., 2004) was advantageous to this research.

6.1 Conducting the Research

Throughout the thesis, I make use of insights gained during eight-months of participant observation, recorded in the form of field notes, as well as qualitative interviews with female asylum-seekers in an emergency shelter for refugees in Berlin, Germany. However, the current thesis was not the main research project undertaken at the time the field notes were compiled. The observations were carried out between the August 2017 and April 2018. The interviews were conducted between the 01st of March and 27th of April 2018.

During the first three months, I worked as an intern observing and supporting the social work in the accommodation centre for asylum seekers. As previous field research showed me, initial assumptions do not match the findings. Thus, participant observations took place before and the interviews were conducted. Field notes include summaries of informal conversations and subjective observations. The observations guided me to the theoretical framework and the interview guidelines, hence the inductive approach was rather appropriate. In order to answer the research questions, field notes and qualitative interviews complement each other.

Trying to shed light on individual experiences as opposed to representing a group, the collection of data relied mostly on ethnographic research methods. The five cases were analysed in detail according to socially-constructed phenomena, examined through data collected in the form of semi-structured interviews and participant observations (Barker, 2012). However, one has to emphasize that even though this research was inspired by ethnographic methods, due to the arguably short time span of the field research, the thesis does not qualify in all aspects as an ethnographic study (eight months of full time work divided into two research projects). The extent of involvement in the informants' lives differed just as their involvement and interest in the research purpose did too (David, 2009).

6.2 The Informants

With the ambition of understanding the manner and abilities of care-giving within refugee families separated by national borders, five Afghan mothers were the chosen sample of interest. The reality of being an asylum seeker in Germany while family members are residing in another destination country is presented and analysed based on the participants' explanations and may differ from other female asylum seekers. In Berlin I knew female asylum seekers with whom I had established a close relationship while I was coordinating several activities, such as German courses, sports' classes and sightseeing tours.

All informants arrived in Germany in the first half of 2017 and had been, at the time of the interviews, separated from their families for an average of 7 months. The five informants were staying in an NGO-led emergency shelter and two had received their residence permit (subsidiary protection), two were denied and one was waiting for the decision.

All five women arrived without children or any other type of kin. None of them had applied for family reunion, though one had been reunited with her son at the time of the interview. They also shared the same nationality (Afghan) and circumstantial context – an asylum-seeking mother in Germany with family (spouse and children) in Greece. The family dynamic differed, as some of them had children under the age of 10 whereas some had above and even adult children. With the exception of two (one divorcee and one widowed), the others had been married for an average of 9 years. Sharing the same circumstances and family constitution, posed a challenge in finding a larger sample for my research, a fact that will be reflected upon in the Limitations. Nevertheless, the sample confers diversity and richness to the data, while the female refugees represent an interesting group to the study of transnationalism.

6.2 Meeting and Approaching the Informants

As a primary method of sampling I made use of 'snowball sampling'. Whereas other methods are more time-consuming, snowball sampling was suitable for the limited time span of the thesis. While conducting participant observations, the informal settings provided a safe, women-only environment. Such environments included rooms for sports' classes, health and beauty workshops and sexual education classes. Following informal discussions, I had the opportunity to engage with women who had arrived in Berlin and discovered their personal life stories. I discovered a woman interested in my research who had family living in Greece. Via the provision of contact information (Noy, 2008) from one informant, I was able to meet

Afghan mothers maintaining transnational relations with family in a country of transit - Greece. Having to speak about the separation from their families, I made sure that each woman met me beforehand and took part in one of my classes. That way, the interview would benefit from an informal, stress-free environment. The snowball sampling provides for a sensible approach and "develops a certain degree of trust" (Noy 2008, p.329) because of the person who initiates the contact between the interviewer and the interviewee. A woman whom I had already interviewed informed me of other potential informants and she approached them by informing them of my research intentions but not without advising me:

> 'We are in a difficult situation and it's very hard to speak about family when they're not with you. You have to be careful how you speak and what questions you ask. I trust you because I have known you for a long time I want to help you.' (interview Hila, my translation)

I made sure that the women had informal encounters with me well before the interview, so that on the day of the interview they would entrust me with their personal stories. Having worked in an emergency shelter for refugees in Berlin, I had the chance to meet many interpreters and that is how I met Carolyne, an English woman, who assisted me in my interviews with Farsi-German translation. After each interview, Carolyne would sit with me and go through my notes, pointing out some of the information and exact phrases which might have been lost.

All interviewed informants mentioned the difficulties they had when speaking about their families. Without exception, all five women expressed strongly how sad and lonely they felt. These emotions were transposed into crying, sobbing, stopping the interview and glazing, and deep breathing. As I was not a stranger to them, the informants told me they felt comfortable in my presence because they 'had a shoulder to cry on'. One of the women said I remind her of her daughter and that inspired her to talk to me. The women whom I have met in the emergency shelter in Berlin and the ones that fit the purpose of the thesis were asked to participate in the interviews. The relations built while working in Berlin increased the interviewer-interviewee trust and thus the quality of interviews, as more information was disclosed (Dundon, Ryan, 2010). Moreover, some informants approached me with their voluntary willingness to partake in the research because they had heard about the topic. Thus, the interview setting became more comfortable and informal in some cases and the "classical, asymmetrical power relation" (Noy, 2008) did not pose a limitation to the collection of data.

By working in the emergency shelter, I was not constrained by bureaucratic barriers, but did nevertheless sign a confidentiality agreement upon conducting the interviews.

Though the snowball sample has many advantages, I will now turn to the disadvantages that arose while using this sampling method. By relying on the first informant to put me in contact with another informant, one is not in control over who that person might be and if she complies with the research intention (Heckathorn, 1997). Thus, one very much relies on the information provided by the link person.

The main aspect of qualitative interviews is not to offer a great representability of one's data set but rather an illustrative one. The sampling method poses challenges in this sense. The five interviewed women were friends with each other and shared some of the same cultural aspects (such as language, religious beliefs, nationality) and arrived around the same time – spring of 2017. As Noy (2008), this might have kept me in a 'social bubble'. The group of women interviewed is nevertheless heterogeneous, as they have different educational backgrounds, family relations, and reasons for leaving the country of transit. Moreover, I considered engaging in meaningful encounters and thus building trust with the informants to be relevant when discussing topics like family separation and the context of migration. A diverse sample within the sample frame has a bigger potential to voice different aspects of the topic (Weiss, 1994, p.17).

6.3 The Interviews and the Observations

The use of an inductive approach and the semi-structured interviews offered the informants a certain degree of freedom over the aspects that would be talked about in the interview. The interview guideline prepared in advance kept an overview of the themes and questions that needed to be covered (Barker, 2012). The core themes of the interviews to be touched upon in every interview were: migration context, legal status, provision of financial and emotional support, care-giving resources, expectations of family reunion, mediums of communication (see Appendix for interview guideline). Since an informal and rather natural setting was desirable, a chronological order of the mentioned themes was not kept. This allowed the women to "open up and express themselves in their own terms, and at their own pace" (Bernard, 1988, p.204 in Barker, 2012).

The interviews have been recorded on a mobile device and later transcribed. Mimics, facial expressions and signs of body language do not serve the purpose of analysis. The duration of interviews took between 30 and 60 minutes. In the beginning of each interview I presented

myself, though the women knew me beforehand. I regarded the presentation of myself and research intentions as crucial, as the first minutes of an interview are decisive to how the informant will see one during the interview (Kvale, 2007). Moreover, the motivation and interest in the research topic were elaborately touched upon while repeatedly expressing gratitude for the informant's willingness to be interviewed. After having asked for permission, I was allowed to record all interviews and notes were taken occasionally. The informants were first asked to introduce themselves, not only to place their story of migration into a wider context, but also to acknowledge the fact that the interviewees should not be regarded solely as objects of study, but as human beings with an identity that goes beyond the categorisation as "asylum seeker/transnational mother/refugee" (Matusevich, 2016).

On several occasions during the participatory observations the women shared personal information and stories about themselves, mostly about their challenges on the journey to Greece and later to Germany. This is how I came to be aware of and interested in the research topic. The observations which took place after the interviews were conducted in groups of women who came to the sports' classes. The decision to conduct the observations in a group was to see the dynamics between the women and personal stories shared among them. However, most of the information shared does not fall within the scope of the present research. Speaking to informants in their rooms or women-only rooms helped the general interview atmosphere, as they felt comfortable sharing visual imagery (without wearing their headscarf at times) of their family and youth.

The fact that I was a migrant helped form a close bond with the five women interviewed. The women were aware of the limited period of time I was going to be at the centre and perhaps this benefited the honesty and openness. In contrast to previous worries, informants were generally very happy to speak and did not show signs of reluctance when speaking about family tensions. Besides emotional difficulties (crying, sobbing), while speaking to the women about their children and spouses, no other visible difficulties emerged. However, these could have been lost in the process of translation. The women were very willing to share their thoughts and stories with the reassurance that their names would be replaced. Each interview differed slightly, as the extent varied to how the participants answered each question, thereby affecting the number of questions asked in each interview As the study did not include any financial reimbursement, the length of my stay was prolonged after the interviews, as many had questions about their legal right to family reunification. Moreover,

after the official interview, I was invited to eat and drink tea with the informant and the interpreter.

6.4 Transcription and Evaluation of Data

Due to the time-consuming transcription of qualitative interviews a simple method of transcribing was preferred. Throughout the thesis I emphasize the content of the data rather than the intonation of the statements (Kucartz et al., 2008). The preferred outcome was an easily readable document, thus the pauses have not been marked (Dresing, Pehl 2013, p.21).
After the transcription, I spent a significant amount of time reading and taking notes on the printed version of the interviews. With the purpose of obtaining a sense of the whole data, I read through the collected data on several occasions (Tesch, 1990 in Hsieh, 2005), in order to develop different codes. Key themes and findings arose while revising, and in a second revision of the transcription, subcodes were formulated and developed. Theoretical concepts were then developed into tools (Marrying, 2000) to analyse the study's findings. As a method of qualitative content analysis the "interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh 2005, p.1278) was chosen. Here, it should be pointed out that the collected data and the literature review of theoretical concepts are valuable to the research.

6.5 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

I conclude this chapter by identifying the specificities and limitations of the chosen methodological framework and acknowledge the ways in which these have influenced the outcomes of the research.
As none of the women spoke English and had an intermediate level of German, the interviews had to be conducted in their native language, Farsi. Due to the lack of funding for this research, I relied on Carolyne, an interpreter at the emergency shelter in Berlin who guided residents with Farsi-German translations. She assisted me during the five interviews after which I translated the interviews into English. Nevertheless, the language barrier posed a significant limitation, as Carolyne was at times overwhelmed by the amount of information given during the interview. Rather than translating word by word, Carolyne translated the core of the information and phrases. Hence, when quoting the informants I use single quotation marks ('...'), as double quotation marks ("...") would signalize a word-to-word translation. As Carolyne's first language was either Farsi or German, she assisted me even after the interviews to guide my findings and to follow-up on details she regarded as

essential. Therefore, the use of single quotation marks is preferred in order to reproduce the informants' statements and ideas because data may have been lost in the course of translation to a certain degree.

Carolyne, though a non-professional interpreter, contributed immensely to my research both as interpreter and researcher as she also "co-constructed meanings" (Harris et al. 2013, p.408). Moreover, the researcher is responsible for providing for a safe and comfortable interview environment, though the interpreter is the one setting the atmosphere as she is the one to speak to the informant for the bigger part (Harris et al. 2013).

Kvale (2007) notes that social science should serve the scientific as well as human interest. The context of the research revealed the emotional laden context of separation during the interviews, thus anonymity was ensured by keeping the interviews confidential[1], changing the names of the participants and signing a confidentiality agreement with the emergency shelter. Being aware of the well-being of the informants, the research interest and intentions were discussed with the supervisor ahead of conducting the interviews. The study's purpose was clearly stated before an interview as a way of informed consent (Schnell, Heinritz, 2006) in order for the informant to decide whether or not she wished to take part in the study. Moreover, I ensured the informants they could pause the interview at any given moment if they felt uncomfortable or felt that the questions were unsuitable. Additionally, I observed many paused the interviews to have a moment of silence and continued shortly after. When informants cried, I tried to comfort them by offering a glass of water or a snack. Most used the opportunity to look at pictures of their family, mostly with children.

Ahead of the interviews, I informed my guest-institution supervisor of my research intentions. I was advised by the supervisor of the emergency shelter, to assure the informants about the expected outcomes of the research project and that I was in no way involved in their decision-making or family reunion. Areas of tension such as these were deemed as self-critical preparation of research (Krause, 2016). One of the participants offered me the opportunity to interview a woman living with her children in Denmark who sustained transnational relations with her husband in Afghanistan. I turned the offer down, as this particular situation did not fit into the scope of the research.

Another ethical consideration concerns the distant family. Even though their experiences were not the focal point of the research, their perspectives should not be disregarded in future

[1] Available upon request only for the supervisor or the mediator

research because they are deemed to be valuable as well. Instead, questions about the family and children were directed to the women.

Findings which arose while analyzing the data which are not being investigated in the thesis are mentioned in the Reflection and serve the purpose of further research. Although the representation of the mother's life is beyond the aim of the thesis, the care-giving modes cannot be separated from other aspects of the transnational migration experience. The questions were formulated in a way which allowed the participants to express their points of view thus highlighting their experiences. This strategy ensured that participants were able to influence the agenda of the interview, and communicate which was important for them to discuss, within the scope of the research interest (Kvale, 2007).

7. Analytical Framework

The following chapter comprises the analytical framework of the material produced by my eight month fieldwork study which consisted of semi-structured interviews and participatory observations with Afghan refugee women in Germany who have family in Greece.

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the collected data in relation to the care exchange across distance through the lens of transnational migration and to examine the role of the legal status and rights have on family life. Additionally, I am to show how distance is overcome by a variety of care-giving capabilities. I illustrate the analytical framework through coding of the interviews according to analytical tools as a set of 'capabilities' (Merla, Baldassar, 2011) investigated in relation to the legal status and rights of the informants. The slightly changed capabilities framework (Merla, Baldassar, 2011) includes mobility, communication, time allocation, education/knowledge, financial support (in Kilkey, Merla, 2014).

By acknowledging the heterogenous character of different types of care-giving arrangements within refugee transnational families, I ground my work "in the acknowledgement that migration does not end with settlement and that migrants [and refugees] maintain regular contacts and exchange care across borders" (Kilkey, Merla, 2013, p.210).

7.1 An analysis of care-giving capabilities of Afghan refugee mothers

The following section begins with the informants' experiences of transnational care. I conclude with an analysis of the capabilities that influence the exchange of care across borders in relation to the status they had acquired and legal rights.

Hila's story

Hila, Ali and their four children, a middle-class family, decided to leave their home country of Afghanistan when Ali began receiving threats at his work placement. When they left Hila was a stay-at-home mother while Ali was working for an American company, coordinating soldiers in Afghanistan. Initially, they planned that the family (they and their four children) would leave together and their destination country was Germany. Before arriving to Greece, they had spent six months in Turkey in order to settle after a long and tiring walking journey from Kabul. As time passed, Hila wished for better living conditions and professional health care for her disabled two year-old daughter. They arrived to Greece on a boat and were taken to Athens where they lived in a park with tents before being allocated social housing due to the daughter's disability (post-conception genetic deformation). During the eight months

spent in Greece both Ali and Hila sought employment opportunities. However, they had at the time not applied for asylum and were hence considered 'irregular'. She did not dedicate time to organize care-giving arrangements or school applications, because she did not see living in Greece as a viable future. Meanwhile, Hila had built social ties in order to find a trustworthy form of transport to Germany. She remembers people in the park approaching refugees and offering travel documents, boarding passes and container rides to Germany.

After eight moths they decided to leave Greece and paid a truck driver to take them across borders to Italy, from where they had arranged a car to go to Germany. The border checks for big cars are not mandatory, unless the authorities demand it. Hila was separated from the family, because the driver of her car said she would not be able to pick up the children, as this needed to be done quickly. As the children went in the same car as Ali, the heat and poor travelling conditions created tensions and the two year-old daughter began to cry, upon which the car was stopped at the border and not allowed to go any further. The other car continued the journey to Italy where Hila transitioned to another vehicle and noticed that her family was nowhere to be found. Nevertheless, Hila decided to continue the journey to Germany and arrived in Hamburg but was allocated an emergency accommodation shelter in Berlin shortly after.

At the time of the interview, Hila had not seen her family for eight months and was still waiting for a decision regarding her asylum application. While waiting, Hila received a six-month part-time internship as a dressmaker, with the help of a friend who works there. Otherwise, she spends her time in the accommodation shelter, video-calling her children. She asks for pictures of her children, their food and living conditions to assure they are taken good care of by the husband. Hila also shares pictures and videos with them of places she has visited, in the hope that they can soon experience them together. She wishes to share these experiences with them because in this way they can be a part of them. She occasionally cries while speaking to her husband about the hardships they have living at a distance. Additionally she part takes in sports' activities, goes to school to learn German in the hope that this will raise the possibilities of being reunited with her family.

Basira's story

Basira was living in a 'conflict region' of Afghanistan with her husband and three children. She worked as a dressmaker while her husband was working an engineer. Upon deciding to leave, her husband Mohammad arranged for his mother to accompany them, as she was a

widow. Basira regarded this as a sensible decision as the mother-in-law could take care of the children while they work.

On the journey to Greece, they had spent five months in Iran, a transit country where a lot of Afghan refugees are stranded. Shortly after arriving to Greece, the family decided to remain and seek work opportunities and arrange educational occupations for the three children.

Basira and her family had spent 18 months in Greece, before she was sexually assaulted by a security guard in their assigned camp. The prospect of declaring it to the police seemed hopeless to her as she thought she was not credible and as other residents in the camp would have condemned her for walking in the camp alone at night. She decided to leave, as she did not want to continue living somewhere where she would be in constant contact with her aggressor.

While her husband arranged for her to travel to Germany by flight, Basira remembers the feeling of guilt about leaving her children behind. By that time, the children adjusted to the living conditions, local language and care arrangements hence her decision to leave alone. Basira travelled by flight, accompanied by a man she did not know.

Upon her arrival in Berlin, she was unsure about the next steps but managed to receive guidance from a Farsi-speaking man she met in the train station. She sought asylum and was placed in an emergency accommodation shelter in Berlin. At the time of the interview, Basira had not seen her family for nine months. She had received subsidiary protection and is entitled to work. However, because of her illness and epileptic seizures, she has not sought work placements and is occupying her time by taking part in sewing workshops and sports' activities at the shelter. Moreover, she takes German classes in the hope of occupying the free time she would otherwise spend on feeling unhappy. She speaks to her children multiple times every day and asks about their well-being. She receives daily updates from her husband about the living situation, the health and safety of the camp. Upon receiving her travel document from the embassy of Afghanistan, she hopes to be able to visit her family in Greece.

As these two examples illustrate, the ability to exchange care at a distance is influenced by the following factors: mobility, social relations, time allocation, education and knowledge, paid work and financial support, communication and emotional support. Further, I will emphasize the role the legal status and rights have on accessing and using the mentioned capabilities.

7.1.1 Opportunities for Mobility

None of the informants of this study have acquired the legal status or necessary travel documents that would allow them to travel. However, they all expressed the desire for proximity care. While in the process of receiving a decision regarding the asylum application, Hila receives accommodation, a bank account with 100 €/month, language classes and an identification document. However, the identity document is not a substitution for a travel document. Merla and Baldassar (2011) see the capability of mobility as a distribution of funds directed towards family members or visits to the home country.

Due to her 'waiting status', Hila is not allowed to leave the country or assigned region (Berlin). While in the waiting stage she does not enjoy financial support from another source other than the German government and is not able to contribute to her families' economic needs, though she expresses desire to offer support. Hila, would like to contribute to the financial cost of her daughter's knee operation. In this sense, Baldassar (2008) points to the care-giving obligations, especially for women, related to cultural expectations.

There is a crucial difference between the two women. Whereas one has to wait for her application to be processed, the other is waiting for her travel documents which will enable her to visit her family in Greece. The mobility includes time management and monetary remittances but B says "I wish time was the biggest problem. We are not allowed to leave, to send money, to work and we have all this time on our hands". Therefore, in the case of refugees, remittances, legal rights and status pose a challenge to the ability to travel. The legal status of the refugees defines the exit/entry rights and this in turn, can directly affect the opportunity for families to engage in proximity care-giving.

Faria's story

Faria, a 45-year-old woman, left Afghanistan in the hope of a better future for herself and her daughter. She left Afghanistan on her own, after being ostraticized for being a female business woman and for not wearing the hijab on a daily base. On her journey to Germany she stopped in several transit countries such as Iran, Turkey and Greece. In Greece she was homeless and decided to proceed with her migration project of arriving in Germany and applying for family reunification with her daughter.

Shortly after arriving in Germany, her daughter left Afghanistan because her grandmother, her main carer, had passed away. Faria was particularly concerned about her daughter's safety so she guided and advised her daughter on the journey to Greece. Her daughter now

lives in Greece and attends a local school and has not seen Faria in six months. They call each other every day and exchange advice as Faria wishes to be involved in the decision-making process of her 17-year old daughter. Faria's asylum application was not approved and consequently she appealed the decision. At the time of the interview Faria was waiting for the outcome of the appeal.

7.1.2 Employment and Education Prospects

While waiting, Faria attends a German course but expresses feeling disempowered because she is unable to proceed with her career.

> 'I feel sad because I cannot work. In Afghanistan I was a businesswoman. Here, I have to start all over again, I'm learning how to read and write, I'm learning the alphabet [...] It is a big difference' (interview Faria, my translation).

Education and knowledge are indirectly associated with transnational care (Merla, Baldassar, 2011). Faria is not entitled to having her degree recognised or to study further. The opportunity to do so would improve her change to paid work and could thus actively participate in form of remittances in the transnational care-giving of her daughter. Faria also expressed being 'disappointed' due to the inability to contribute to her daughter's teaching material in Greece. The right to work is withheld from her because the asylum has not been approved, thus she receives welfare benefits of 100 €/month instead. Faria thinks 'it is barely enough for myself' and recounts of a time she has asked authorities if she can send monetary remittance to her daughter and was denied. Moreover, she suggests not contributing to her daughter's financial needs limits her ability to show emotional care other than through phrases such as 'I love you, I wish I could be with you, I miss you' which she considers 'not enough for a 17 year old'.

7.1.3 The Challenges of the Breadwinner

Seila's story

As illustrated in the previous section, the women desire to contribute with financial remittances to their family well-being. Before migrating, Seila, a 25-year-old computer engineer says 'I was the head of the house, I provided for everyone'. While her husband, a mathematician, is waiting for a decision on his asylum application in Greece, Seila was denied in Germany. She left Afghanistan due to the increased violence in her hometown, and in Greece searched for better employment possibilities. The married couple acquired false

travel documentation but her husband was detained by airport authorities. She describes the journey she made alone six months ahead as “very painful”. Seila wishes to help her husband by sending him financial remittances because the living conditions in his camp are poor and he receives few government benefits. She feels responsible in her role as the ‘breadwinner’, as it has been hers since they met in Afghanistan. Since she cannot occupy this role, she strives to receive a high language level, as this would improve her chance of employment. However, since her asylum has not been approved and she is waiting for the result of the appeal, it is likely that she will not be able to take up on the role of the breadwinner.

7.1.4 ‘Counting the Hours’

All interviewed mothers said they have a great deal of free time. They all take time to exchange care with their families by being available for virtual care-giving practices via Internet apps such as Skype and Immo almost at all times. Despite not being able to travel or to work, women stay in touch with their partners and children and call them whenever the members of the family are able.

Madina, a widower of three, arrived in Germany on her own. Her son worked as a Farsi-English translator for American troops and an increased fear of persecution and repeatedly being physically abused by members of Taliban organizations, made both determined to leave Afghanistan.

Madina’s story

During the long journey, she fell sick and her son took care of her on their journey. After a five-months-long stay in Greece, she decided to leave and continue her journey to Germany, her intended country of destination. She travelled by flight with a false travel document which she returned upon arriving in Germany. While in Greece, the son, Kai, and Hamburg-based daughter, Mila, coordinated the long-distance support for Madina and the two siblings maintained constant contact with each other. Mila has been in Hamburg for 14 years and was able to welcome her mother at the airport. Because of her family status and employment allowance, Mila was able to contribute to financial remittances which helped fund the transport costs for both Madina and later Kai. They remained in contact with their mother as she travelled alone from Greece to Germany and so coordinated her arrival, as the two siblings ‘negotiated commitments’ (Finch, Mason 1993) with a third sibling.

Although Madina received subsidiary protection, which enables her to work, her sickness limits her to chores around the emergency shelter where she lives. Hence, allocating time for communicating with her children does not impose a challenge for Madina for:

> 'I have so much free time. Sometimes I wait for them to be free too, I don't want to worry them. When I see my children and grandchildren on video, I hug the phone and feel that they need me and I need them. It's so easy now [...] I need to call them more often' (interview Madina, my translation).

Therefore, as Baldassar (2007) suggests, to Madina, it is a care duty to communicate with her family members and due to new technologies she feels strong obligation to stay in touch.
Under EU law, family members include ascendant and descendant dependent relatives regardless of their nationality. However, Ryan (2011) argues that legislation narrows the criteria for who counts as 'family', with the purpose of decreasing the number of viable applicants.

> "The following are regarded as family members for the purposes of family asylum: spouses and registered partners, minor, unmarried children, the parents of minor, unmarried persons for the purpose of care and custody, other adults who have personal custody of minor, unmarried persons, unmarried siblings of minors." (BAMF, 2016).

With the purpose of illustrating Ryan's (2011) finding, I argue that family already residing in Germany ahead of the women's migration could have applied for family reunification. For instance, Hila's aunt had already lived in Munich and could have applied for family reunion. The application would have likely not been successful because the Hila is not part of the aunt's nuclear family. However, neither of the two considered this before Hila migrated. Madina also had family, in Hamburg - her married daughter and her two children. One could argue that applying for family reunion would have offered Madina less precarious travel conditions and perhaps international refugee protection.

7.1.5 Maintaining Contact through Emotional Support

Different types of care require a certain amount of involvement and resources. I move on to illustrate key elements and resources used for the purpose of communication through different mediums. Here I seek to demonstrate that the access to and knowledge of communication technologies contributes to the circulation of information, advice, visual imagery and educational knowledge. This element of Merla and Baldassar's (2011) 'typology

of resources required for care-giving in transnational families' is a significant one which influence emotional care-giving within refugee transnational families. Madina remembers:

> 'I was so happy when we installed the wi-fi. My daughter bought her children a tablet especially so they could call me. Now they call me and I call them very often. We speak about our lives, I tell them about the teachings of Islam. But I don't want to force it' (interview Madina, my translation)

As illustrated in the interview with Madina, communication technology and the accessibility is the point of departure for the maintenance of relationships across borders (Madianou, Miller 2012). Emotions in the form of advice, religious teachings and information can be transferred through technological mediums when one has the medium and necessary skills available to do so.

All women had the technological skills necessary to use a smartphone. Broadly speaking, the women provide their children and spouses with practical and emotional support and thus contribute to their well-being. In this way, Baldassar et al. (2007) argues virtual caring practices are exchanged across borders with ease.

Hila often exchanges information with her spouse about their four children. In the interview she spoke emphatically about her six-year-old daughter who is disabled. She believes her daughter should receive special care but the parents lack the necessary financial resources to employ a professional carer. Hila also speaks of occasional 'fights' with her spouse which she says arise over disagreements regarding the coordination and functioning of their family. She stays informed about the amount of care her daughter receives and contests it when necessary:

> 'He takes care of the children but I tell him he needs to take better care of them because I am worried about them. One day my daughter was sitting on the bed and she fell. I told him he didn't look after her properly. It's difficult for him too, he tells me. My youngest daughter cannot go to the bathroom alone and needs a lot of help. That's why there are some reasons to fight sometimes. I am alone here but he doesn't think about that' (interview Hila, 2018, my translation).

Faria does not have anyone caring for her daughter, who arrived in Greece as an unaccompanied minor. She speaks to her daily and asks 'if she is healthy and sane'. Although Faria is not physically involved in her daughter's upbringing, she feels a 'special connection' to her because they share advice and emotions. She allocates a significant amount of time every day to speak to her daughter and is involved in her mental and physical well-being.

> ‘When she cries and misses me I wish I could teleport to her and tell her everything will be ok. I tell her to be strong because if not we won’t face these difficulties. After she hangs up I cry like a baby’ (interview Fariba, my translation).

Their relationship prior to migration was close, but Faria acknowledges that her daughter is developing on her own and ‘finding new friends’. Her daughter’s adaptability to the new country and growing independence are reasons for concern at times for Faria.
Basira referred to the emotional drain on her mental health felt in Berlin because of the absence of her children.

> ‘My head is occupied with problems but I try to concentrate on learning German so that I can get by on my own. I will try to find a way to reunite with my family so that we can be together’ (interview Basira, my translation).

When she arrived in Germany, Basira expressed the need to receive professional health-care for her depression and epileptic seizures. The context of migration for Basira invoked many traumatic memories during the interview. As a distraction Basira showed me pictures and videos of her children and spouse and told me short stories about them. Her mother-in-law migrated to Greece with the family and is living with her son and grandchildren. Basira expressed gratitude for her mother-in-law’s support.

7.2 Conclusive Findings of the Analysis

Out of five women interviewed, two had received Subsidary Protection under German Law (AsylG 4, BAMF, 2016), two had had their application denied and one was waiting for her application to be processed. The residency rights influence the mobility of caregivers and subsequently the care receivers. None of the women I interviewed had sent or received remittances from distance kin. Madziva and Zontini (2012) and Al-Ali (2002) argue that state policies and legal status play a major role in facilitating or hindering family relations across borders. They conclude that although geographical proximity is certainly a challenge to family life, it does not impede family life. Care-giving arrangements for refugee families are dependent on institutions which provide the necessary resources such as material resources (Kilkey, Merla, 2013).
Transnational families have developed practices and capabilities of living “together at distance” and thus confront the challenges to family life presented by separation. As Merla and Baldassar (2014) confirm that “without a doubt, managing the exchange of care across distance is difficult, time consuming, challenging, exhausting, expensive and often painful

and heart-rending." In the analytical framework I have emphasized that the status and legal rights of transnational refugees can limit the care-giving capabilities and pointed to the lack of national and transnational policies that facilitate family reunification.

The experiences presented and analysed through the analytical framework represent features of transnational motherhood as well, although the concept of transnational motherhood is not the central theme of the thesis. Being in contact and emotionally connected to the children may not be satisfactory for the mothers as they express the desire of engaging in the social practices such as sending monetary remittances. By not being given the right to meet the financial expectations, women feel disempowered. Distance in itself does not stand in the way of conducting family life (Madziva, Zontini, 2012; Asis et al., 2004; Baldassar et al., 2007; Baldassar, Merla 2014; Kilkey, Merla 2014; Goulbourne et al., 2010); but rather the limited social and political rights.

The analytical framework remains limited because illustrations draw on a single ethnic group in a single country, at the giving end, though I do not aim to disregard the receiving end of care.

8. Conclusion

The central aim of this thesis was to identify the care-giving capabilities of while paying close attention to legal rights. This study has investigated how Afghan refugee mothers in Germany manage care-giving in the situations when their families resided in a country of transit – Greece – while the women migrated in search of safety and were thus separated by distance and national borders. The following questions were employed:

How do Afghan mothers in Germany sustain family relations while their families reside in a country of transit?

How do transnational refugee mothers make use of care-giving capabilities?

In what ways does their legal status influence on the manner of care-giving across borders?

The purpose the research questions was to contribute to the exploration of female refugee experiences, respectively of Afghan refugee mothers and contesting the Western ideology of family life (face-to-face present setting). The thesis has shown that family bonds are created despite the geographical distance (Baldassar, 2008). The care-giving capabilities approach (Merla, Baldassar, 2011) conferred the research an in-depth insight into how the legal status, rights and context of migration influence the resources necessary for the provision of care.

While the analytical framework used in the thesis gives an account of distinctions between how refugees, as opposed to migrants, maintain family relations, this comparison was beyond the scope of my research. As illustrated in the case of Hila, who left her children unwillingly, her forced migration experience stood in the way of her providing an alternative care arrangement (Zontini, Madziva, 2012) for her children. The obstacles that prevent Afghan mothers from providing proximity care are embedded in asylum policies and thus legal rights (Al-Ali et al. 2001). The women are not allowed to travel, are restricted to a small amount of welfare benefits and thus lack the financial resources to send 'money gifts'. Therefore, the thesis shows that the context of migration, the legal status of the women and their rights has an important influence on how transnational care-giving is carried out.

The thesis has attempted to outline the care-giving capabilities of Afghan women in Germany while pointing to the limitations they meet due to their legal status. These have been discussed in the context of existing research on transnational families and motherhood. As technology allows us to communicate instantly, women in this study make use of technological resources as ways of sharing their emotions through video-calling, sending

visual imagery and long messages. Therefore, in the study of transnational families emotions "need to be understood as constitutive of the transnational family experience itself" (Skrbiš, 2008). As a growing body of research shows that transnational families are able "to create caring networks, overcoming distance and different state regimes", the thesis reflects on the limited amount of literature focused on refugees and their families in the hope of contributing and refining our understanding of how female transnational refugees sustain family ties.

Communication in various forms plays a crucial role as mothers use it to maintain close relations across borders (Hondagneu-Sotelo, Avila, 1997). These may be even more prevalent in the constitution of refugee transnational families, as they do not possess the affordability or availability to travel or contribute financially to their families' well-being which can lead to their disempowerment and to a pressing feeling of guilt. Refugee women, at a collective level, may feel responsible for others as well. Yet, Afghan women show family resilience that helps in their adjustment to the role of transnational mother and they utilise religion to help cope with their difficulties.

The home country of Afghanistan is a conflict state and, with little security over legal status and freedom of movement, their 'capacity and desire' (Al-Ali et al., 2001 in Brees, 2010) to contribute to the family needs in Greece are thus strained on economic, political and social levels. Despite their perceived vulnerability and victimhood, research by Engbersen (2007 in Brees, 2010) has found that except for economic activities, refugees in Europe are active in all types of transnationalism.

The analytical framework comprises the factors that limit or hinder the circulation of care across time and space. I draw on illustrations from the interviews to depict the opportunities for mobility and education, financial and emotional involvement of the giving end of care. Additionally, I emphasize the importance of legal rights to access valid travel documents, citizenship and family reunification in conducting transnational motherhood. Merla and Baldassar (2014) discuss their findings in relation to "the developments of national and transnational policies and services that facilitate family reunification and connectedness" (p.39). New methodological approaches and detailed analysis of these processes are crucial steps towards better understanding transnational family life (Parreñas, 2005) among refugee families.

9. Reflection

As this thesis concentrated on a female refugee group, one should shift the attention to examining further care-giving capabilities (in terms of theoretical conceptions and methodological framework) that could have been employed. First, the constitution of gender in transnational communication and its implications as recorded by Parreñas (2005) would have offered this research an insightful angle. Moreover, the relation between gender and care-giving arrangements could provide a more holistic view on the research proposal while considering improvements made in the specific-for-gender help-seeking institutions (Straiton el. al, 2017). The members of the family (spouse, children and extended kin) are not included in the thesis and thus one can easily disregard their views on family relations and separation. Moreover, I conducted the research in Germany, a welfare country which is arguably welcoming refugees with 'open borders' and little public hostility. Further research could extend to host societies with more stringent asylum policies or emergent societies to weaken the 'Western centrism' of the study on transnational families (Kilkey, Merla, 2013).

In terms of methodology, a comparative study could give greater attention to the same group in several countries or several groups of refugees in a single country (Kilkey, Merla, 2013). Other than the used conceptual categories, a wider use of quantitative data is needed for understanding social processes that include nation-states and their national contexts. By limiting the study of transnational communities and activities to the migration field, we narrow the understanding of developments and how they are "defining the boundaries of social life" (Levitt, Schiller, 2004, p.2) in other fields. As a large research agenda remains, various forms of mobility and immobility within transnational families remain unknown to the scholarly community. The use of a multi-sited research approach would show both ends of care circulation and the effects of separation, thus contributing to this still-emerging field of research. In discussing alternative methodological approaches, I wish to point to a considerable challenge for future research to shift the attention from a "nation state-centred prism" (Amelina, Faist, 2012) to a more inclusion-based approach for multi-perspective view on transnationalism. Furthermore, a theoretical lens through which we could analyse social inequalities at an institutional level (macro) and transnational family life (micro) (Parreñas, 2005) could explore the underlying means of transnational parenthood. Lastly, a "regime-of-mobility" approach as proposed by Schiller and Salazar (2014) could contribute to considering travel rights as legal rights in public policy.

10. Discussion

To date, the study of International Migration and Ethnic Studies, and Refugee Studies has contributed to shaping the transnational concept. Members of transnational communities link the sending-transit-receiving countries (Boyd, 1989) although, collectively, political activity and activism is practiced by a small minority of refugees (Brees, 2010). Refugee agencies and policy influence should be studied further (Al-Ali, Koser, 2002). At the same time, nation-states exert power over migration policies thus transnational practices. Even though a nation-state lens is not within the scope of this research, the authoritarian regime of Afghanistan and the conflict situation there have an effect on legal rights and thus on the transnational activities of the refugees (Brees, 2010). Additionally, legal status impedes their participation in Afghanistan's political parties and Afghan refugees rarely receive positive political attention. Research by Brees (2010) suggests that legal status is not a "precondition for transnationalism", yet Banki (2006) argues that legal status can also be an impediment to transnationalism because it can create tension between non-recognized co-nationals and lead to jealousy.

We need to acknowledge transnational families as a family form. The stigmatization of this type of family formation fails to acknowledge that transnational families have increasingly developed practices to maintain family relations beyond the challenges that separation imposes in the migration process (Baldassar, Merla, 2014). By this, I do not mean to undermine the challenges faced by members of transnational families, rather to interrogate and reflect on why certain types of migration and mobile individuals become or fail to become the focus of "praise, condemnations, desire, suppression or fear" (Schiller, Salazar, 2014, p. 14). When one reflects on the notion of forced migration, one can then challenge the family norm that discredits caring for each other without physical proximity and leads to situating care-giving within the study of transnational refugees.

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Appendix

Name/Age	Marital status	Number of children	Time since leaving Greece	Asylum application/ Legal status	Legal rights
Hila, 34	married	4	7 months	Not processed	Accommodation in emergency/ collective shelter 100 €/month – own a bank account Language classes Free-of-charge health care
Basira. 33	married	3	8 months	Subsidiary protection	Accommodation in emergency/reception/collective shelter 320 €/month – own a bank account Language classes Rent a property Family reunification (withheld until July 2018) Unrestricted access to the labour market Free-of-charge health care Identity card – can only travel with documentation issued by the country of origin
Madina, 53	widow	3, one deceased	8 months	Subsidiary protection	Accommodation in emergency/reception/collective shelter 320 €/month – own a bank account Language classes Rent a property Family reunification (withheld until July 2018) Unrestricted access to the labour market Free-of-charge health care Identity card – can only travel with documentation issued by the country of origin
Faria, 45	divorced	1	6 ½ months	Rejected	Accommodation in emergency/ collective shelter 100 €/month Language classes Right to appeal Free-of-charge health care with a relatively long waiting time
Seila, 25	married	1	6 months	Rejected	Accommodation in emergency/ collective shelter 100 €/month Language classes Right to appeal Free-of-charge health care with a relatively long waiting time

Table 1: Overview of the informants

Semi-structured interviews with five women at an emergency accommodation centre for asylum-seekers and refugees:

Informant has the possibility to elaborate on aspects she might find relevant. Not all of the listed questions were asked, some were covered from the participant observations. Apart from the opening questions, no strict chronological order of the questions or themes was held.

Background information for the interviewee

1. Presenting the researcher, the interpreter, research project and motivation
2. Emphasis on nature of project: University related, not able to influence the family situation in any way.
3. The data is confidential. I will not share the information with any of the co-workers, social services or German authorities. The data will only be used for research purposes.
4. You can always interrupt me or the translator if you want to add something. Tell me everything that is important to you about the subject.
5. Please tell me if you feel uncomfortable. We can stop or take a break whenever you want. It might be a difficult subject for you to talk about.
6. Do you have questions about my research?

Opening questions

1. Name, age, nationality, legal status
2. When did you arrive in Germany? When did you leave Afghanistan/Greece?
3. Where are your family members now?
4. Please describe your everyday life, what do you do?

Questions regarding the care-giving capabilities (Baldassar, Merla, 2011)

- Education and knowledge

How you try to distract yourself? What activities do you part take in? Do you go to school?

What helps you to feel better?

Do you talk with others about your family? Special help? Organization?

How do you support your family?

What challenges do you face in the accommodation centre? In Berlin and in Germany?

- Family situation

What does their everyday routine look like?

Has anything changed with your partner/children since being away?

What are the biggest problems for your family, there? Problems spouse, problems kids?

How is your family doing? What do they think about you being here?

How does your family live: living conditions, with who? Do they get support from other family members, friends?

Who takes care of the children?

Do you have family elsewhere?

- Decision-making and financial support

Why did you leave Greece?

How did you decide to come to Germany? How did you come to Germany (medium)?

Does your family receive welfare benefits?

Can you send them money?

- Communication and emotional support

Do you speak to your family?

How do you feel when you speak to your family (time allocation)?

Do you speak to your family openly (about challenges in Germany, your health, emotional state etc)?

How often do you speak to them? Through what mediums do you speak to your family (smarthphone, laptop/Skype, Whatsapp/video-calling, call)?

When you speak to your family, what do you talk about (your/their situation, living conditions, finance, children's education)?

Does your family want to come to Germany?

How do you encourage your children/spouse?

- Mobility

Do you hope that they can come to Germany?

Would you rather go back to Greece or them to come to Germany?

Do you think they can come to Germany through family reunification or illegally?

Does your family tell you to go back to Greece?